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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Ada County Man Tests Positive for West Nile Virus

An Ada County man has tested positive for West Nile virus, the third human case reported in Idaho this year and the first reported human case in Idaho's most populous county. The man, in his seventies, is expected to make a full recovery.

"Last week we had two human cases of West Nile virus reported in Gooding and Elmore counties, and we continue to receive new reports of bird and horse infections," says Dr. Christine Hahn, Idaho State Epidemiologist. "Mosquito season is still with us -- people need to protect themselves and their families and 'Fight the Bite' of mosquitoes."

In the last several weeks, West Nile virus infections have been reported in animals and people in the Idaho counties of Ada, Canyon, Elmore, Gem, Gooding and Twin Falls. Besides the three Idaho human infections reported, there have been nine horses, four birds and one alpaca that have tested positive for the virus. Nationally, 1,400 human cases of West Nile virus have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2004, contributing to 35 deaths.

People and animals are infected by West Nile virus through the bite of an infected mosquito. People cannot contract the virus from casual contact with an infected animal or person. The virus is spread by migrating infected birds, which are bitten by mosquitoes. The infected mosquitoes can then pass the virus on to people and other animals.

Dr. Hahn says that approximately 80 percent of people infected with West Nile virus do not feel sick. Others may experience a mild, flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever. Occasionally the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50.

People can take the following precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites:

- Insect-proof your home by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on your property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local District Health Department or Fish and Game office. (Ada and Elmore counties have confirmed West Nile infections in their bird populations in 2004; all future dead bird reports in these two counties should be submitted to your local Fish and Game office.)

Horses and certain species of birds, including crows, magpies, ravens, jays and raptors, are often severely affected by West Nile virus. There is not a vaccine available for people and most animals, but there is a vaccine approved for horses. Approximately one-third of unvaccinated horses that are infected with West Nile virus die, so horse owners are strongly encouraged to contact their veterinarian for more information on the horse vaccine.

For health information about West Nile virus, please contact your district health department, or visit Health and Welfare's website at: www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has useful information about West Nile virus at: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm. For information about protecting your horse, contact your local veterinarian, or visit the Department of Agriculture website at www.agri.idaho.gov. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has helpful West Nile information at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/manage_issues/wnv/surveillance.cfm

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(Editors: For more information please contact Tom Shanahan at 208-334-0668.)